

EIGHT LEGGED ESSAY: FREEDOM AND VIRTUE COMES FROM GREEN SIMPLICITY

Living with nature is the root of virtue, freedom and good government. It fosters a wholesome simplicity that offers the security of self sufficiency, community and mutually supportive kinfolk.

The proliferation of cities has resulted in weakness and insecurity. The lack of land and united kin causes fear of want, driving people to float upon credit and hanker after thin margins and uncertain pay. Such an artificial way of life deprives humanity of the harmony and tangible bounty offered by nature— trapping people in a cycle of materialistic dependency, and robbing them of the happiness of self sufficiency and life's simple pleasures ; inevitably leading to stress, mental strains and body breaking illnesses. All their lives, they must juggle mortgages, incessant expenses, and the threats of inflation and unemployment. Likewise, a byzantine bureaucracy and court system naturally arises to restrict and humiliate ; the end result is a dense maze of burdensome nonsense and anxieties.

According to the Jin Dynasty scholar Fu Xuan (217-278 AD):

“Instead of regulating, monitoring, levying on and intervening in the lives, properties, movement and transactions of individuals, the authorities should only oversee the general conditions of the economy. Instead of overseeing the economy, they should discipline the bureaucracy. Instead of disciplining the bureaucracy, they should reign in the budget. But, it would be best if those at the highest echelons of power could refrain from wasting the nation's wealth and resources. For their

careful stewardship will naturally inspire everyone below to delight in restraint and find peace in modesty.”

“If the authorities were to simply demand from the people while lusting for power and squandering resources under various pretexts, then they are even more foolish than the one that hopes a forest to remain intact after a raging inferno.”

“A good government is lenient to the people. They lower taxes, reduce laws and open borders. They are strict with the corporate and financial sector while generous to the primary sector. They support wholesome ruralization over commercial urbanization.”

“Modest institutions and agrarianism repels intrigue, dishonesty and avarice while allowing the dreams of the virtuous to take wing. Moreover, neither exploitative monopolies nor restrictive patents and copyrights will exist, and respect for the environment and nature will abound.”

- Scroll 49, Fu Zi

Thus, the dependency and toxic culture caused by the complexity of urbanization has not only led to unbridled avarice, it has also caused an unwieldy, micromanaging and ineffective bureaucracy to spring up as a response.

The Ven. Master Chin Kung has said that: “Competition leads to quarrels, which leads to wars.” Therefore, the very nature of urbanization, the requirement that vast amounts of people congregate in a small space and compete for limited opportunities, is certainly a recipe for disaster. Moreover, as people are driven by

desperation to be more sly, hateful and greedy, more invasive and arbitrary regulations are created as a response. However, nothing is actually solved but everyone is burdened by this sword of Damocles—all liable to be ensnared by unforeseeable legal and bureaucratic pedantry.

As a result, the people remain dependent and transient while the state bloats into a wasteful, shortsighted, micromanaging behemoth that is entrusted to solve everything but ends up becoming a self-perpetuating Gordian knot.

If indeed,

Those in power have the people's best interest at heart,
Then they would prevent laws from becoming abstract art.

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments to abide,
They involved not lawyers, bureaucrats or the like.

If laws & taxes were abolished and all borders freely opened,
True prosperity, happiness and security would freely abound.

If governments could implement wise rural first policies,
It could offer much on little funding and a small police.

Thus:

The people would be able to happily order their own affairs.

They would not be burdened by taxes, conscription and borders.

Travel between nations will no longer be a wearisome ritual.

It would become as easy as sauntering in the park for all.

Moreover, crime and miscarriages of justice would disappear.

All will be provided for as nature's bounty to all appears!

Isn't simplicity the greatest bliss? And agrarianism—harmonious, wholesome, tangible, natural and noncompetitive—is surely the best solution to maintain and allow peace and simplicity, why not?

It is clear that:

Those who till the land are honest, moral and efficient.

They do not engage in vicious competition and are self sufficient.

The harvest and the sweat of their brow gives them self esteem.

Families become clans, caring for each other like a team.

The good air and green surroundings protect their health.

Their active work makes them fit and gives them strength.

Crime rates will fall along with the density of population.

The lack of complex infrastructure eliminates corruption.

Restriction of avaricious, plutocratic commerce will yield weal.

For no one would be harassed by their exploitive, greedy deals.

As 80% of result is derived from 20% of effort, governments should give up micromanaging people's lives and instead focus upon ruralization and frugal, efficient and good stewardship.

If it could discourage the growth of cities, banks, corporations and protect the rights of small landowners and access to common lands and forests, then poverty would disappear.

There would be no need for excessive bureaucracy, volumes of laws, border controls and security checks when a broad brush policy of rural simplicity removes the roots of all ills and fears.

People would have a minimum income guaranteed by nature, thus, governments could do away with most of the shortfall-ridden entitlement programs and the attendant byzantine system.

By getting the people to become self-sufficient and to focus upon orchards and crops instead of trying to cajole each other (as they do in the cities), causes for contention are eliminated.

By allowing people to spread out, tensions and reasons for unrest are naturally eliminated by distance and nature—for a low population density naturally diffuses the grime of overcrowding.

By reversing urbanization, the wings of fraud, profit, corruption—so often feathered by complex infrastructure, corporations, banks, peddling merchants and finance—are clipped for good.

By uniting kinfolk over shared family plots or common lands and forests, the community and the clan unit can care for the old and raise the young without bloated and impersonal bureaucracy.

From the soil arises civilization. To live separate from the earth is like seeking to build cities in the sky. A lofty dream, but one wholly impractical. A country with an urban population larger than the rural population is top heavy and fragile. Such a society creates its own problems, then it comes up with a web of ad hoc regulations to theoretically solve these problems. In the end, this begets only a lumbering behemoth and an aimless and materialistic population that desires much, cajoles and schemes for profit. They spend their days playing around with lies, numbers, loopholes and words ; gladly substituting the security of family and self sufficiency with debt, wearisome dead end jobs and ever thinning paper money.

When people have a place of their own in this world, if they could have a fertile plot to farm, a homestead to ensure self sufficiency and the infinite larder of a common forest to gather from, then there is in effect a sustainable national minimum income.

According to the Analects of Mencius,

20. Mencius replied, 'They are only men of education (Sages), who, without a certain livelihood, are able to maintain a fixed heart. As to the people, if they have not a certain livelihood, it follows that they will not have a fixed heart. And if they have not a fixed heart, there is nothing which they will not do, in the way of self-abandonment, of moral deflection, of depravity, and of wild license. When they thus have been involved in crime, to follow them up and punish them;-- this is to entrap the people. How can such a thing as entrapping the people be done under the rule of a benevolent man?

21. 'Therefore an intelligent ruler will regulate the livelihood of the people, so as to make sure that, for those above them, they shall have sufficient wherewith to serve their parents, and, for those below

them, sufficient wherewith to support their wives and children; that in good years they shall always be abundantly satisfied, and that in bad years they shall escape the danger of perishing. After this he may urge them, and they will proceed to what is good, for in this case the people will follow after it with ease.

22. 'Now, the livelihood of the people is so regulated, that, above, they have not sufficient wherewith to serve their parents, and, below, they have not sufficient wherewith to support their wives and children. Notwithstanding good years, their lives are continually embittered, and, in bad years, they do not escape perishing. In such circumstances they only try to save themselves from death, and are afraid they will not succeed. What leisure have they to cultivate propriety and righteousness?'

Thus, communities based around agriculture provide continuous security. No one fears hunger when they grow their own food. With this security, there would be no crime and corruption— all ills caused by desperation. Surrounded by the beauty and splendor of nature, their work is fulfilling. Their work is simple, their hours are short and leisure time plentiful. In fact, according to Juliet B Schor:

“...A thirteenth-century estimate finds that whole peasant families did not put in more than 150 days per year on their land. Manorial records from fourteenth-century England indicate an extremely short working year -- 175 days -- for servile laborers. Later evidence for farmer-miners, a group with control over their worktime, indicates they worked only 180 days a year.”

With all this extra free time, art and religion and music can be cultivated. The rat race is replaced by a more meaningful, healthy, cultured and enriching life.

While industry and commerce are needed, they are required only in small quantities. Like the icing on the cake ; an adornment and nothing more.

The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long. Thus, while the modern society may seem advanced, prosperous and enticing with its glittering cities and commerce, it is in truth very vulnerable to the slightest disruption and ultimately unsustainable. While it lasts, it is burdened with wasteful bureaucracies, unbridled ambitions, deficits, the desperation of the helpless majority, materialism and social ills. It is nothing more than a bright flame that quickly consumes all the oil and then exhausts itself.

Mother Earth forever warm hearth,

The soil that gives birth to all mirth,

Long-lasting, all embracing and boundless,

Everblooming and always borderless,

A wealful delight ; a virtuous birthright.

Essay by Brian Chung.

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